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THE WOMEN IN SPENSER'S ALLEGORY OF LOVE

Like every other noble monument of the Gothic spirit, the *Faerie Queene* is constantly rewarding the student with the revelation of fresh and unexpected phrases, novel sources of delight. Quite a new aspect of the poem thus presented itself to me in a recent study of the allegory of love in Books III, IV and V. Hitherto, such characters as Amoret, Florimell and Belpheobe had always seemed mere repetitions of the conventional heroines of romance, but in this fresh survey delicate and refined distinctions between the characters began to appear, and I then came to feel that in these very distinctions resides much of the meaning of the allegory. Accordingly, this paper is an attempt to throw fresh light upon the teachings of the poem through an exposition of the characters of Amoret, Belpheobe, Florimell, Radigund and Britomart.

The proper background for these characters is of course Spenser's theory of love. This is essentially the theory of the early Renaissance, an adaptation to more modern conditions of ideals that maintained in medieval days. It demanded an aristocratic society, for worthy love exists only among those of gentle birth. The court is therefore defined as "the great school-maistresse of all courtesy," and the country as a stranger to "all civile usage and gentility," with its rude rusticity tending to deform even gentle spirits. Thus when a courteous damsel is found among the lowly, she invariably proves to be of gentle blood and rearing. The Squire of Dames does indeed testify that the only woman whom he had ever found to be chaste for chastity's own sake was a damsel of low degree whom he had discovered by chance in a rural cottage, a maiden who was fair, and in whose countenance dwelt simple truth, but the Squire of Dames is a blasé man of the world, a jester and breaker of idols, a captious cynic. Among the lowly, then, only vulgar love exists, but in the gentle heart love breeds desire of honor and even brings forth bounteous deeds:

The baser wit, whose ydle thoughts alway
Are wont to cleave unto the lowly clay,
It stirreth up to sensual desire,
And in lewd slouth to wast his careless day;
But in brave spirite it kindles goodly fire,
That to all high desert and honour doth aspire.

He suffereth it uncomely idlenesse
In his free thought to build her sluggish nest,
Ne suffereth it thought of ungentlenesse
Ever to creepe into his nobler brest;
But to the highest and the worthiest
Lifteth it up that else would lowly fall:
It lettes not fall, it lettes it not to rest.

In theory, men who are "wise, warlike, personable, courteous and kind" love women who are gracious and modest, adorned with chastity, whose lives are given to deeds of courtesy and kindness.

Such is the ideal society. Spenser devotes his allegory to men and women who are striving for this ideal, opposed by defects within themselves or by evil forces without. Against this background any particular character in the allegory of love must be viewed.

As already stated, Amoret, Belpheobe and Florimell seem, at first blush, mere repetitions of a common type. All three are praised in extravagant terms for their grace, beauty, and chastity. Of Amoret it is said that Psyche

her lessoned
In all the lore of love, and goodly womanhead.
In which when she to perfect ripenes grew,
Of grace and beautie noble Paragone,
She brought her forth into the worldes vew
To be the ensample of true love alone,
And Lodestarre of all chaste affection
To all fayre Ladies that doe live on ground.

Of Florimell it is said,

The surest signe, whereby ye may her know,
Is that she is the fairest wight alive, I trow.
That Ladie is, (quoth he) where so she bee,
The bountiest virgin and most debonaire
That ever living eye, I weene, did see.
Lives none this day that may with her compare
In stedfast chastitie and vertue rare,
The goodly ornaments of beautie bright;
And is ycleped Florimel the fayre.

So great was her chastity that it was caroled by the angels in heaven:

Eternall thraldom was to here more lief
Then losse of chastitie, or chaunge of love:

Dye had she rather in tormenting grieve
 Then any should of falsenesse her reprove,
 Or looseness, that she lightly did remove.
 Most vertuous virgin! glory be thy meed,
 And crowne of heavenly prayse with Saintes above,
 Where most sweet hymnes of this thy famous deed
 Are still emongst them song, that far my rymes exceed.

Fit song of Angels caroled to bee!
 But yet whatso my feeble Muse can frame
 Shall be t'advance thy goodly chastitie
 And to enroll thy memorable name
 In th' heart of every honourable Dame,
 That they thy vertuous deedes may imitate,
 And be partakers of thy endlesse fame.

Of Belphoebe it is said:

In so great prayse of stedfast chastity
 Nathlesse she was so courteous and kynde,
 Tempered with grace and goodly modesty,
 That seemed those two vertues strove to fynd
 The higher place in her Heroick mynd:
 So striving each did other more augment,
 And both encreast the prayse of woman kynde,
 And both encreast her beautie excellent:
 So all did make in her a perfect complement.

Though all three of these characters are made to conform to the neo-Platonic conception of the harmony of grace, beauty and chastity, if attention be fixed upon points of dissimilarity rather than of resemblance, it will be apparent that Amoret is made the special embodiment of grace and charm; Belphoebe, of Chastity; and Florimell, of Beauty. This differentiation is more or less suggested by the epithets and descriptive terms applied to the characters and is the key to the parts that they play in the allegory. Thus Florimell is always "the fair," with "face as cleare as Christall stone." When Prince Arthur and Guyon start in pursuit of her, fleeing as she is from the lustful forester, they are said to "follow beauties chace." When Prince Arthur beholds her beauty, she seems to him so lovely that he forgets the vision of the Faerie Queene herself, and ardently hopes that Florimell herself may prove to be the queen. So fair is she that, at the contest for the girdle, though the face of Amoret

plainly did expresse
 The heavenly pourtraict of bright Angels hew,

the face of the false Florimell, who bears but the outward semblance of the true Florimell "once seen did all the rest dismay."

Similarly, Belphebe is so completely the embodiment of chastity that such lustful creatures as instinctively pursue Amoret and Florimell, instinctively shrink from her presence, and the story of the divine origin of chastity is appropriately told while her praise is being sung.

A review of the respective adventures of these characters will show how complete and careful is the differentiation.

Amoret was the daughter of a nymph, Chrysogonee, made pregnant by the sunbeams as she rested from her bath. While yet an infant she was found by Venus, and was reared in the garden of Adonis. To Psyche was committed the care of the child, who brought her up with her own daughter, Pleasure, and her lessoned "In all the lore of love and goodly womanhead." The darling of Venus, the pupil of Psyche, the playmate of Pleasure, what can she represent but the charm, the glowing, love-compelling power of woman? And this conception of the character is abundantly substantiated by her subsequent career.

Amoret is the type of physical beauty, physical beauty not at its worst but at its very best. Amoret is not Lilith, who

Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave,
Till heart and body and life are in its hold,

but no more is she the Sybylla Palmifera, beauty enthroned

Under the arch of life, where love and death,
Terror and mystery, guard her shrine.

This physical beauty, uncorrupted though it be, is yet far removed from that soul's beauty and loveliness which is the ideal of womanly perfection, that spiritual beauty of which the beauty of the flesh is but the outer vesture. Amoret must therefore suffer and be schooled ere her beauty can be transformed into this nobler type. Spenser portrays the process of this discipline.

Psyche had

brought her forth into this worldes vew,
To be the ensample of true love alone,
And Lodestarre of all chaste affection
To all fayre ladies that doe live on ground.

But much training was needed ere she was ready to serve as this "ensample."

Betrothed to Scudamour, who had won the shield of love with its motto,

Blessed the man that well can use this bliss:
Whosoever be the shield, Faire Amoret be his;

led forth, remonstrant with "tender teares" and "witching smiles," from the temple of Venus, where she had been seated in the lap of Womanhood, at the feet of the veiled figure of the goddess; at the marriage festivities she is carried away by the enchanter, Busyrane, with a masque of love "by way of sport as oft in masks is known." For seven months the beautiful victim is confined in the castle of this wretch, and daily tormented, until at length rescued by Britomart, the maiden-knight of Chastity. Britomart it seems had chanced upon Scudamour, asleep by a fountain, lamenting his bride. Thereupon she had offered her aid and together they had sought the castle, but only the chaste Britomart is able to penetrate the suffocating smoke and fire by which it is guarded. On the first night Britomart sees a pageant of love, with fair Amoret led by Despight and Cruelty, her breast bleeding from a wound and her heart laid in a silver basin; on the second night she sees Amoret chained to a pillar, while Busyrane writes enchantments with human blood. Then it is that Britomart attacks the enchanter, forces him to dispel his charms and restores Amoret to liberty, while all love's insignia throughout the castle disappear. In the edition of 1590, Amoret and Scudamour are reunited outside of the castle; in the edition of 1596, the love allegory having taken more complete form in the poet's mind, the version is changed, and Scudamour, disheartened, has departed for further aid.

For a season thereafter Britomart and Amoret proceed together. One evening they come to a castle where a knight without a lady must lie outside the gate. A young knight contends for Amoret, but is easily overcome by Britomart. Riding again, they meet Blandamour—Blandishment in love, Até—Discord, Paridell—Lustfullness, and Duessa—Falsehood. Afraid to oppose Britomart himself, Paridell asks Blandamour to do so. Him Britomart easily overcomes. At the contest for the girdle of Florimel, Britomart presents Amoret, and she is the only one upon whom the girdle will remain.

All goes well with Amoret until, straying through the wood one day while Britomart sleeps, she is carried off by Lust. Once she

escapes from him, only to be chased again. Finally she is rescued by the young squire of Belpheobe, Timias, but not until she has been wounded, for whenever the squire strikes with his javelin, Lust holds the lady in front of himself to receive the blow. Long Amoret lies in a swoon, while Timias sits beside her, wiping her eyes, kissing them, and "handling soft the hurts which she did get." Amoret, however, is shortly left alone, for Belpheobe, chancing to arrive and to find her squire showing such marks of tenderness, angrily reproves him, and he, distressed by her reproach, follows hard after when she flees in anger. Amoret is not left defenceless, however, for she is straightway succored by Prince Arthur, the Grace of God.

Amoret and Prince Arthur now ride together, though the identity of neither is disclosed. As they proceed, they behold afar six knights engaged in arms, and the Briton Prince, indignant that two of the knights are assailed by four, hastens to the scene. The two knights prove to be Britomart and Scudamour,—for Britomart had come upon Scudamour again and joined him afresh in his search for Amoret,—who are attacked by stern Druon, lewd Claribell, love-lavish Blandamour and Lustfull Paridell. Prince Arthur separates the contestants. Peace restored, the knights journey together and, as they ride, Scudamour is prevailed upon to tell the story of his wooing. Nothing is said to indicate what becomes of Prince Arthur, but presumably he rejoins Amoret. Apparently Amoret had been left at a distance by the Prince, but at this point the character abruptly drops out of the narrative, and does not reappear in the entire course of the poem. The reunion of Amoret and Scudamour is therefore not formally accomplished. It would seem to have been crowded out by the press of other episodes.

Despite this abrupt termination of the adventures of Amoret, what the poet is trying to express through this character is sufficiently evident. No sooner is Amoret wed to Sir Scudamour than the enchantments of love separate her from her lord, and only the solicitous aid of Chastity, extended now to one and now to another of this estranged couple, is able to expedite their reunion. Amoret had yet to learn that real union must be based upon spiritual, not physical, love. Intense and spirited, Amoret thus becomes the victim of love's enchantment, but against it she struggles, knowing it to be unworthy of her. When Chastity

first appears to Amoret, she does not recognize her deliverer therein, and fears her until she learns that Chastity is the very essence of peerless womanhood. Even after Amoret has been thus liberated from the shows of lustful love, she is not able to rely upon herself. Attended by Chastity, she is so secure that Paridell, a knight typifying lust, does not even attempt to gain her; from the assaults of Blandishment she is equally secure. With Chastity her champion, she can even wear the golden girdle. But no sooner does she venture forth alone, Chastity asleep, than she is snatched away by Lust, and then grievously wounded by the very squire who seeks to rescue her. Such is the compelling power of her beauty, that even this Squire of Belpheobe forgets the conduct becoming his station. Finally the Grace of God comes to her rescue. Without Chastity and the Grace of God, says Spenser, the beauty and charm of woman are powerless to protect her, and attract men only to her harm. Without Chastity and the Grace of God no real union of men and women can be consummated.

If marriage found Amoret unprepared for such a spiritual union, equally unprepared was Sir Scudamour. He desires an ideal union, but he lacks somewhat in energy, and somewhat in stern chastity. He, too, needs to be schooled. Britomart finds him asleep by a fountain, lamenting for Amoret, when he should be at his quest. He cannot stand the test of fire, nor has he sufficient faith in Chastity to believe that she can rescue his lady from the castle of Busyrane. He is induced to believe the tales of the soft-tongued Blandamour against the purity of Amoret. He even suspects the integrity of Chastity, and thinks that she has played him false. But Scudamour, like Amoret, grows, and in this growth is revealed the intent of the allegory. Though he struggles against Chastity, she triumphs over him, and he then is rewarded by learning that Amoret is still a maid. Finally, when Chastity vows never to leave him until Amoret is found, his weakness is replaced by strength, and the allegorical intent becomes completely manifest. Thus Scudamour, like Amoret, is seeking after true fellowship in love.

Opposed to Amoret, thus carried away with the shows of love, thus provocative of passion, thus ardent, thus helpless, thus prompting passion in men, is Belpheobe; Belpheobe, in whom chastity is combined with austerity and aloofness, an austerity

and aloofness that mar the completeness and harmony of her character. The poet carefully contrasts her with Amoret.

The twin-sister of Amoret, she was the darling of Diana and the pupil of Phoebe. Lust, which had taken captive Amoret, at once recognizes in Belpheobe his mortal enemy, and straightway that he sees her, flies in terror from her presence. A false knight like Blandamour rides a course for Amoret and the cunning Busy-rane readily deceives her, but when Braggadochio, the blustering pretender, thinks to embrace Belpheobe in his "bastard arms," she bends her bright javelin against him, fiercely menacing, turns her about, and flees apace, while he stands amazed, fearing her wrath. She is as self-reliant as Amoret is helpless. Yet with her composure and austerity she is harsh and ungenerous. To be sure, when once she has recovered from the shocking sight of Timias ghastly and pale from his conflict with the forester, symbol of lust, she nurses him tenderly, but when she comes upon him kissing the cheeks of the fair, unconscious Amoret, she "was filled with deepe disdain and great indignity," and thought to kill them both.

With that selfe arrow which the Carle had Kild;
Yet held her wrathful hand from vengeance sore;
But drawing nigh, ere he her well beheld,
"Is this the faith?" she said—and said no more,
But turned her face, and fled away for evermore.

In the succeeding canto she herself is made unwittingly to condemn her own severity, for when she discovers the squire, all changed in aspect through harassing sorrow, and so unrecognized by her, she invokes "fowle rebuke and shame" upon the author of his misery. Then, when she learns that she is the cause of so great woe, her heart softens, and she receives him once more into favor. Thus did Belpheobe learn that austere virtue is itself unlovely and wrong, and that chastity must be softened by mercy.

Florinell, as already suggested, is the embodiment of beauty. In her first ages flower she was "fostered by the Graces (as they say)," and when she came to the court of the Faerie Queene she brought with her the goodly belt, Cestus,

Dame Venus girdle, by her steemed deare
What time she usd to live in wively sort,
But layd aside when so she usd her looser sport.

This girdle gave the virtue of chaste love and true wifhood. At the court the Fayre Florimell was admired of many knights, of Satyrane, of Paridell, of Calidore, of Peridure, but she loved only Marinell; Marinell, who, warned by the prophesy of Proteus that "a virgin strange and stout him should dismay or kill," became "loves enemy." When rumour reached the court that Marinell had met death at the hands of Britomart, Florimell straightway set out from the court, vowing to find him. Never was woman less prepared to set forth on such a quest, and her adventures in this search are designed to show the dangers with which beauty in woman is beset and the helplessness of beauty. Ready to die in defense of her chastity, she lacks the judgment, self-control, and knowledge of the world which Spenser, in sympathy with the Renaissance, quite as much as with the medieval, ideals of woman, recognized as essential to complete womanhood, that resourcefulness and mastery of circumstances which Shakespeare portrayed with manifest enthusiasm in *Rosalind*, in *Viola*, in *Beatrice*.

Florimell first appears pursued by a forester, "breathing out beastly lust her to defyle." They are perceived by Prince Arthur, Guyon, Britomart and Timias. Prince Arthur and Guyon instantly set off "to reskew her from shameful villany," while Timias pursues the forester. Florimell is lost to sight, but finally Prince Arthur gains view of her, and strives to overtake and comfort her. However, so overcome is she with fear that she cannot recognize the noble intent of even such a knight as Arthur:

Alowd to her he oitentimes did call,
To doe away vaine doubt and needlesse dreed:
Full myld to her he spake, and oft let fall
Many meeke wordes to stay and comfort her withall.
But nothing might relent her hasty flight,
So deepe the deadly feare of that foule swaine
Was earst impressed in her gentle spright.

Her next adventures are designed further to show the pitfalls that threaten beauty: she is assailed first by rough, loutish love, churlish and coarse; then by violent, rapine love; then by subtle and insinuating love, love working through flattery and feigned kindness. Fleeing from Prince Arthur she takes shelter in a lowly cot, where dwell a wicked hag and her boorish son. The hag takes her for a goddess, the pure embodiment of beauty:

And thought her to adore with humble spright:
T'adore thing so divine as beauty, were but right.

The son "cast to love her in his brutish mind." This churl is employed to contrast with the gentle lover, and his laziness and sloth are the natural accompaniments of his lust, just as noble activity ever attends upon honorable love. When Florimell perceives his boorish efforts to win her, she takes refuge in flight, only to be pursued by a beast of horrible aspect that the hag creates by magic to pursue her.

Florimell takes refuge in the boat of a sleeping fisherman. When the fisherman awakes he greedily assails her, for her beauty

in his congealed flesh
Infixt such secrete sting of greedy lust,
That the drie withered stocke it gan refresh,
And kindled heat that soone in flame forth brust.

From the violence of the fisherman she is rescued by Proteus, the Shepherd of the seas.

But when she looked up, to weet what wight
Had her from so infamous fact assoyld,
For shame, but more for feare of his grim sight,
Down in her lap she hid her face, and lowdly shright.

Proteus tries to comfort her, but in vain,

For her faint heart was with the frosen cold
Benumbed so inly, that her wits nigh fayld,
And all her sences with abasement quite were quayld.

Proteus now takes her to his watery abode and tries to win her by his craftiness. He woos her as "an immortal mote a mortall wight"; he woos her as a mortal, as a knight, a king; he transforms himself into a Gyaunt, a Centaur, a raging storm; but all to no avail. Finally he throws her into a dungeon. Thus is beauty seen to be exposed to every kind of evil love.

Confined in the dungeon for seven months, her laments are by chance overheard of Marinell, who is straightway filled with remorse:

All which complaint when Marinell had heard,
And understood the cause of all her care
To come of him for using her so hard,
His stubborne heart, that never felt misfare,
Was toucht with soft remorse and pitty rare;
That even for grieve of minde he oft did grene.

Marinell now wastes away through love, until finally, through the aid of Neptune, the release of Florimell is accomplished. Beauty is at last safe, protected by a knight of nobility and wealth.

Contrasted with Florimell is the False Florimell, outwardly resembling her, but in reality a licentious courtesan and flirt, who deceives most of the knights, but who cannot deceive Britomart and Artegall, the knights of Chastity and Justice. When placed beside the real Florimell she vanishes completely away, for beauty of body that has not beauty of spirit for its counterpart is fleeting and ephemeral.

Marinell, the lover of Florimell, also plays an interesting part in this allegory of love. He is a knight of great riches, and of doughty courage and prowess, but his original attitude toward women is not merely an attitude of indifference, but of actual hostility; an attitude neither natural nor chivalric.

Forthy she gave him warning every day
The love of woman not to entertaine;
A lesson too too hard for living clay
From love in course of nature to refraine.
Yet he his mother's lore did well retaine,
And ever from fayre Ladies love did fly;
Yet many Ladies fayre did oft complaine,
That they for love of him would algates dy:
Dy, who so list for him, he was loves enemy.

While it is better to be love's enemy than to lust, best of all is to love chastely. Therefore Britomart, the Knight of Chastity, lays low the presumptive pride of Marinell, and the poet approves the deed, for while the mother of Marinell curses the hand that smote him,

none of all those curses overtoke
The warlike Maide, th' ensample of that might;
But fairly well shee thryvd, and well did brooke
Her noble deeds, ne her right course for ought forsooke.

Not until he conceives his great love for Florimell is Marinell a worthy exponent of the courtly gentleman.

As Florimell typifies beauty in woman, so Radigund typifies strength. This bold, aggressive, masculine woman strikingly contrasts with the delicate, romantic, highly-feminized Florimell. Radigund possessed many qualities that the Renaissance prized in its women: she is beautiful, so beautiful that her fair visage, bathed in blood and sweat as it was, seemed to Artegall "a miracle of natures goodly grace"; she bore herself with distinction, "with stately port and proud magnificence"; she was brave, "fild with courage and with joyous glee." But just as the delicacy of Flori-

mell needed to be infused with hardening alloy, so the superb strength of Radigund, so admirable in itself, needed to be tempered with gentleness and modesty. Since she tried to break those bonds which very nature imposes upon woman and which "virtuous women wisely understand," since, in violation of justice as well as of nature, she wished woman to usurp the rôle of man, quite properly her career ended in disaster, and quite properly at the hands of woman herself. The Renaissance had expressed its ideal of a strong woman in the gracious Countess of Urbino, who ruled her court with distinction and without the sacrifice of feminine sweetness and modesty.

Since, then, Amoret is the embodiment of charm in woman, Belpheobe of chastity, Florimell of beauty, and Radigund of strength, a character is required in whom all of these qualities shall be harmoniously combined. Such a character is supplied in Britomart, Spenser's example of perfect womanhood. Britomart is at once charming, chaste, beautiful and strong, so that the Third Book might properly have been termed, "The Legend of Britomartis, or of Perfect Womanhood."

The beauty of Britomart is so overpowering that when, her armour laid aside, men behold her beauty, they worship her as a divinity. Thus, when she doffs her armour at the castle of Malbecco,

they smitten were
With great amazement of so wondrous sight;
And each on other, and they all on her,
Stood gazing, as if sudden great affright
Had them surprized. At last, avizing right
Her goodly personage and glorious hew,
Which they so much mistooke, they tooke delight
In their first error, and yett still anew
With wonder of her beauty fed their hongry vew.

Yet note their hongry vew be satisfide,
But seeing still the more desir'd to see,
And ever firmly fixed did abide
In contemplation of divinitee.

Likewise, when Artegall had cloven the helmet of Britomart, and saw

That peerless paterne of Dame Natures pride
And heavenly image of perfection,

he fell humbly down,

And of his wonder made religion,
Weening some heavenly goddess he did see.

The beauty of Britomart embraced both feminine delicacy and masculine strength, so that to Guyon

Faire Lady she him seemd, like Lady drest,
But fairest knight alive, when armed was her brest.

Thus, while she fascinated men, as did Amoret, she had abundant protection within herself:

For shee was full of amiable grace
And manly terror mixed therewithall;
That as the one stird up affections bace,
So th' other did mens rash desires apall,
And hold them backe that would in error fall:
As hee that hath espide a vermeill Rose,
To which sharp thornes and breres the way forstall,
Dare not for dread his hardy hand expose,
But wishing it far off his ydle wish doth lose.

The chastity of Britomart is constantly illustrated. She recoils at the first improper touch when the Lady of Delight, seized with love, seeks to couch beside her; she wins the tourney of the Knights of Maidenhead; she alone detects the impurity of the False Florimell, at the contest for the girdle; she vindicates the superiority of chastity to coldness by overpowering Marinell, and its superiority to temperance by overpowering Guyon; and the giant Ollyphant, type of Lust, flees from her presence, as Lust, in the person of the wild man, fled from the presence of Belphebe.

Not only is Britomart chaste herself, but she is strong enough to help many other men and women to be chaste. She enables the Red Crosse Knight to resist Malecasta and thus to remain true to Una, in other words, holiness to withstand the temptation to worship delight instead of truth; she penetrates the smoke, enters the castle of Busyrane, and liberates Amoret; she assists Scudamour and Amoret in their search for one another; and she delivers her own dear knight from the bondage of Radigund.

Innumerable are the triumphs in arms that vindicate her strength; not even Artegall can stand before her, not even when aided by such knights as Cambell and Triamond.

Her self-control is the more to be admired because of her ardency. Her passion for Artegall, once she has seen his image in Merlin's

